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Chapter II

The Setting in Space; the Physical and Administrative Geography of Bastar

Before dealing with the Maria Gonds, I propose to describe in this and the following chapter the main features of the physical and administrative geography and the ethnography of Bastar. The political divisions frequently are founded on the old tribal organization of the country, to which I have alluded in the first chapter; and in discussing the distribution of the tribes it is impossible to avoid constantly referring to them.

The great river Indrawati, which flows across the centre of the State from east to west with a winding course within the State of about 240 miles, almost bisects the State, and is its main geographical feature. It rises near Rampur Thuamul in Kalahandi, one of the former Orissa States, whence it flows south-west some thirty miles till, after forming the boundary between Kalahandi and the Orissa Province for eight or nine miles, it crosses the south-east corner of the Naurangpur taluq of the latter, and then for a winding course of some sixty miles divides the Naurangpur from the Jeypore taluq of Jeypore zamindari, till it enters the Jagdalpur tahsil of Bastar near the confluence of the Bhaskel tributary, thirteen miles above Jagdalpur. At Chitrakot, twenty-four miles by road and thirty-five by river below Jagdalpur, the Indrawati plunges off the edge of the great 2,000 feet plateau of north-east Bastar and northern Jeypore in a beautiful horseshoe fall ninety-four feet high, followed by a series of wild rapids down a valley rapidly descending between high cliff ramparts. In its course across Jeypore zamindari and Jagdalpur tahsil it is a deep sluggish river, winding along in great S-bends through field and evergreen sal forest, and always more or less rusty in colour from flowing over deep beds of red laterite or *murram*. It receives no large tributaries from the south above Chitrakot, as here it flows close to the watershed dividing it from the Kolab-Saberi, the great tributary of the Godavari that rises in the Eastern Ghats above Jeypore and for many miles forms the eastern boundary of Bastar; at one point a tributary of the Kolab is less than a mile from the main current of the Indrawati. But just above Chitrakot falls it is joined by the Narangi, and about ten miles below the falls by the Bacordig, which drain most of north-east Bastar (the Kondagaon tahsil).